

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANILA 03042 01 OF 02 240744Z

ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2133

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 3042

EA ALSO FOR AMBASSADOR NEWSOM

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, RP

SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: SALONGA DISCUSSES AQUINO AND
THE ELECTIONS

REF: MANILA 2955

1. SUMMARY: OPPOSITION LEADER JOVITO SALONGA TOLD EMBOFF
THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS IS "PLAYING" WITH AQUINO'S REQUEST
FOR RELEASE BUT IS UNLIKELY TO GRANT IT. AQUINO NOW SEEMS
IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO RUN FOR A LEGISLATIVE SEAT, WHETHER
OR NOT HE IS FREED TO CAMPAIGN, BUT SALONGA FEELS HE COULD
BE PERMANENTLY DISCREDITED IF HE LOSES WHILE THE METRO
MANILA ELECTION IS CONSIDERED RELATIVELY CLEAN. SALONGA IS
ORGANIZING AN OPPOSITION WEEKLY NEWSPAPER WHICH IS EXPECTED
TO APPEAR LATE NEXT WEEK. HE EXPECTS TWO OR THREE OPPOSITION
CANDIDATES TO BE ALLOWED TO WIN IN METRO MANILA, BUT HE DOES
NOT EXPECT AQUINO TO BE AMONG THEM. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF MET FEBRUARY 23 WITH EX-SENATOR SALONGA, LIBERAL
PARTY STEERING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND LEGAL ADVISER TO
BENIGNO AQUINO. FOLLOWING ARE HIS COMMENTS ON RECENT
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS.

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PAGE 02 MANILA 03042 01 OF 02 240744Z

3. AQUINO. SALONGA WAS COMPLETELY PESSIMISTIC THAT
PRESIDENT MARCOS WOULD GRANT AQUINO'S REQUEST FOR RELEASE
FROM DETENTION TO CAMPAIGN. HE FELT MARCOS MIGHT RELEASE
HIM IN THE FINAL FEW DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN IN ORDER TO
AVOID INTERNATIONAL CENSURE, BUT HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW HIM
TO ADDRESS MASS RALLIES OR TO CAMPAIGN ACTIVELY. SALONGA

VISITED AQUINO FEBRUARY 22; AT THAT TIME, AQUINO WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT HE MIGHT BE RELEASED, BUT "HE HAS HIS UPS AND DOWNS." SALONGA PROVIDED TEXTS OF AQUINO'S LETTERS TO MARCOS OF FEBRUARY 21 AND 22 (THESE LETTERS WERE ACCURATELY SUMMARIZED IN MANILA PRESS - SEE REFTTEL AND MANILA 2920). SALONGA SAID SARCASTICALLY THAT, IF AQUINO CONTINUES TO SEND VIRTUALLY DAILY LETTERS TO MARCOS, HE MAY FIND HIMSELF CAMPAIGNING BY "LOVE LETTER" RATHER THAN IN PERSON.

4. SALONGA SAID THAT AQUINO'S ORIGINAL PLAN WAS TO WITHDRAW HIS CANDIDACY IF HE IS NOT RELEASED TO CAMPAIGN. THE ENTIRE LAKAS NG BAYAN (LABAN) OPPOSITION SLATE PRESUMABLY WOULD WITHDRAW WITH HIM. HOWEVER, SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE MADE SUCH A STRONG COMMITMENT ALREADY, SALONGA SAID, THAT IT IS NOW VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO PULL OUT. MARCOS, SALONGA FELT, IS DELIBERATELY PLAYING WITH AQUINO'S HOPES FOR RELEASE; "MARCOS IS A PAST MASTER AT THIS KIND OF TORTURE."

5. SALONGA DISAGREED WITH AQUINO'S BELIEF THAT HE HAS NOTHING TO LOSE BY DECLARING HIS CANDIDACY. IF THE METRO MANILA ELECTIONS ARE CONSIDERED RELATIVELY FAIR BY THE ELECTORATE, AND IF AQUINO AND THE OPPOSITION SLATE ARE BADLY DEFEATED, AQUINO COULD BE PERMANENTLY DISCREDITED. SALONGA SAID IT WAS "ACCEPTABLE BY PHILIPPINE STANDARDS" FOR THE GOVERNMENT PARTY TO SPEND VAST AMOUNTS OF PUBLIC

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PAGE 03 MANILA 03042 01 OF 02 240744Z

MONEY TO "BUY VOETS." IF THEY DO SO, IT WOULD HARDLY BE NECESSARY TO MANIPULATE THE ACTUAL VOTE COUNT, AND SUCH A SITUATION WOULD BE REGARDED LOCALLY AS A FAIR ELECTION. SALONGA SAID MARCOS HAS BOASTED PRIVATELY THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S KBL GROUP IS ALREADY SURE OF 900,000 BLOC VOTES IN METRO MANILA.

6. SALONGA'S ROLE. SALONGA SAID HE IS PERFECTLY WILLING TO SPEAK PUBLICLY AGAINST THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT, BUT HE IS HONOR-BOUND NOT TO ASK FOR VOTES FOR THE LABAN TICKET BECAUSE OF HIS FIRM BELIEF THAT THE ELECTIONS ARE A SHAM. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAS AGREED TO HELP ONE "PENNYLESS" LABAN CANDIDATE FINANCE HIS CAMPAIGN. MORE IMPORTANTLY, SALONGA IS ORGANIZING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WEEKLY OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER. THE FIRST ISSUE IS EXPECTED TO COME OUT LATE NEXT WEEK, I.E., EARLY MARCH, AND IT WILL BE PUBLISHED UNTIL THE END OF THE ELCTION. THE NEWSPAPER, WHICH IS STILL NAMELESS, WILL BE SOLD RATHER THAN DISTRIBUTED FREE BUT WILL NOT ACCEPT ADS. SALONGA HAS PERSONALLY RECRUITED

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PAGE 01 MANILA 03042 02 OF 02 240740Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 3042

EA ALSO FOR AMBASSADOR NEWSOM

A STAFF AND EDITORIAL BOARD. THE PRINTING PRESS,
HE SAID CONFIDENTIALLY, IS "MOSTLY UNDERGROUND." THE
NEWSPAPER WILL SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL LABAN CANDIDATES, BUT
NOT THE ENTIRE SLATE, AND WILL FOCUS ON ATTACKING THE
MARCOS REGIME.

7. CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS. SALONGA IS REMAINING ALOOF FROM
THE LABAN CANDIDATES, BUT HE IS OBVIOUSLY FOLLOWING THE
CAMPAIGN CLOSELY. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE ELECTION
RESULTS ARE FOREORDAINED, AND HE EXPECTS THE KBL TO WIN
ALL BUT TWO OR THREE SEATS IN MANILA. HE SAID THE STRONGEST
CANDIDATES ON THE LABAN TICKET ARE AQUINO AND FORMER
REPRESENTATIVE NEPTALI GONZALES, A BRILLIANT CAMPAIGNER
WHO FORMERLY REPRESENTED MAKATI. (HE STOPPED SHORT, HOWEVER,
OF PREDICTING THEY WOULD BE ALLOWED TO WIN.) THE OTHER
CANDIDATES, HE SAID, REALIZE THEY HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF
WINNING; THEY ARE PARTICIPATING PURELY TO EXPRESS THEIR
OPPOSITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE NOTED THAT CHARITO
PLANAS, AT A LABAN RALLY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
FEBRUARY 22, ADMITTED THAT THE LABAN STRATEGY WAS TO PUBLICIZE
THE OPPOSITION VIEW POINT RATHER THAN TO WIN IBP SEATS.
THIS, HE FELT, WAS A FOOLISH THING TO SAY PUBLICLY.

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PAGE 02 MANILA 03042 02 OF 02 240740Z

8. IN AN ASIDE, SALONGA SAID THAT ONE KBL CANDIDATE,
EX-SENATOR EDDIE ILARDE, A LIBERAL PARTY DEFECTOR, HAD

SENT HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW TO SALONGA TO PLEAD AGAINST
ILARDE'S EXPULSION FROM THE LIBERAL PARTY. HE SAID
ILARDE WAS FORCED TO JOIN THE KBL TICKET IN ORDER
TO KEEP HIS JOB AS A TV ANNOUNCER. SALONGA REPLIED
THAT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE LP WOULD NOT BE AS
HARSH ON ILARDE AS IT COULD BE.
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